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THE MUSICAL AMATEUR

THE COMING MUSICAL SEASON.



THE success of "Pinafore" has caused managers to turn their attention in a new direction, and many an ambitious young composer, who has an opera or two in his portfolio, feels his heart beat with unwonted hope when he looks at the advertisements for the winter and sees three new operas by resident musicians promised by as many managers. One manager makes the new opera the leading attraction of his season, which, as the taste of the public is always untrustworthy and impossible to foresee, is certainly very daring. It is amusing to notice that two out of the three new operas referred to had their treatment (and possibly their subjects) suggested by "Pinafore;" that is to say, the plot of "Pinafore" being naval and of a character to be treated lightly, these two operas have plots—one military, one politico-social—capable of and receiving similar treatment. The titles of the operas are "The Cadets" and "Buttons," respectively. In the former the scene is laid in West Point, in the latter in Washington, and in both the treatment is light and somewhat jocular. As to the quality of the compositions, it is impossible to speak, as the music is being carefully kept from general hearing; but it is rational to suppose that these productions will, like most imitations, fall far below the standard of the original. The third opera is founded on Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," but further than this fact nothing of consequence is known about it.

The result of this new operatic taste on the part of the managers is that opera companies are springing up like mushrooms. Eight are being organized in New York alone. Of course but few of them will last through the season. An astonishing fact to an outsider is the ease with which members are enrolled for these companies. Your average professional man bears within himself an unending spring of hope. Totally ruined twenty times in as many untrustworthy companies, he is as willing as ever to enter the twenty-first; the coming company is always "thoroughly safe, my boy: not like that last swindle I got into," and his sublime faith in the new company usually lasts until the day on which the manager disappears, leaving his hapless company in Detroit or some other distant city, destitute alike of the means to stay or to return home. Then the professional declares that "now his eyes are opened, he will take care he is never caught in such a trap again," and, behold, the next manager who comes along shall engage him for the same salary which the exploded company (should have) paid him, and will eventually abandon him in the same way.

In addition to the numerous companies forming here, there are three coming from Europe. Mapleson will again bring over his fine Italian company; Capoul, a great favorite when here before, and Paola Marié will be heard in opera comique and opera bouffe; and a company is to come here with Miss Blanche Roosevelt as the prima donna. If Mr. Arthur Sullivan's health permits, an English company will give "Pinafore" in this country under his direction and that of Mr. Gilbert (writer of the libretto); and the new opera, on which these gentlemen have been working, will, if finished, be produced.

Various little signs show that the "Pinafore" fever was not eradicated nor worked out last season. The unfavorable weather rather discouraged it, but unmistakable symptoms of a near visitation are apparent, and the first touch of cooler weather will undoubtedly develop them. Whether it will be as violent and extended an epidemic as it was before remains to be seen; but the probabilities are that it will not be.

In concerts the rumors are far too contradictory to be noticed, yet amid the mass of confusion some things are sure. It is sure that Theodore Thomas will again lead

the New York Philharmonic; that Dr. Damrosch will continue his symphony and his Oratorio Society concerts; that the Messrs. Chickering will continue their symphony concerts in their hall with Mr. Carlberg (as in the last season) for conductor; that the Philharmonic Club—a chamber music combination—will again give some of their entertainments; that Carlotta Patti will be heard once more, supported by a company of unknown names (which may be a very good company nevertheless); that Signor Albertini, a young violinist fresh from the Paris Conservatoire where he was covered with honors, will make his debut; that Wilhelmj and Remenyi and Rumcl will all play for us again; and that at least three out of the innumerable pianists who threaten to descend upon us from Europe will undoubtedly come.

There will be plenty to hear and plenty to study. Managers have decided that "times are getting better," and they are preparing an enormous supply with which to meet the expected demand. This creates competition, and by the competition the public gains. Each manager will endeavor to outdo every other, knowing that, in the long run, it is the best company which has the best chance of success.

A VOLUNTEER CHOIR.

IN the first number of this magazine, in a brief article upon church choirs, mention was made of the propriety of using a chorus of volunteer singers in place of the usual paid quartet.

There are many reasons why a volunteer choir is both available and appropriate, and but one reason against its success; that reason is the difficulty—almost the impossibility—of securing from its members a regular attendance at either rehearsals or services.

The course of a volunteer choir is usually something like this: First rehearsal, say, Wednesday night. Every body is deeply interested, the attendance is large, and the hopeful organist, entering a room containing some twenty-five or thirty people who look as though they really meant business, flatters himself that his lines have fallen in pleasant places, and that he, at least, is going to have a set of co-workers who will attend to their part of the duties faithfully and interestedly. The rehearsal commences. It is found to be not such very interesting work, after all, going over that awkward measure again and again in order that the tenors may get that crooked bit of time correctly, and the sopranos conquer their apparently irresistible inclination to sing a C natural for a C sharp. And then, too, Miss Smith has discovered that Miss Jones has on a new hat; and it is absolutely necessary that she should confide the news to her next neighbor and bosom friend, Miss Robinson, with the additional information that this said new hat is "a perfect love"—or the reverse. As a consequence of this confidence both Miss Smith and Miss Robinson lose their places in their music and bring the whole choir into musical mix, rendering a recommencement of the piece under treatment unavoidable, and sorely trying the patience of all the rest concerned. The next rehearsal, Saturday night, is also well attended; only, instead of being ready and waiting when the organist comes, most of the singers drop in after his arrival. It is also more difficult to obtain close attention, or to retain it when once achieved; several of the singers become "silent members" when more than one or two repetitions of a passage are made, leaving the work entirely on the shoulders of some five or six, those faithful few who are fortunately always to be found in these organizations; and, as it is always those who most need rehearsal who rehearse the least, it is these very silent members who make the one or two glaring errors at the service on the ensuing Sunday, and force the advocates of the chorus system to take refuge in the excuse of "insufficient rehearsal," when the objectors attack them with a charge of partial failure. As week after week passes on, the attendance becomes slimmer and slimmer, and more and more irreg-

ular; the organist first fumes, and frets, and finally loses heart entirely, and lets things go as decently as they may with any sort of "scratch" rehearsal; the congregation become disgusted and impatient; the pastor is attacked on all sides by complaints and requests for the discontinuance of this unsatisfactory form of musical performance; and the chorus-choir gradually fades away, and is replaced either by the old quartet, triumphant, with their irreligious and inappropriate musical display, or by the vociferous and inartistic precursor yelling hymn tunes at the full power of his voice, and leading a scrambling congregation through melodic mire to the accompaniment of a blaring organ, and in a harmonic muddle, caused by ambitious individuals who try to realize their own ideas of singing in "parts."

The remedies for these ills are two; each simple and practicable. The first and best is a choir of boys properly trained. Of all music possible in any service of worship, appropriate compositions sung by well-trained boys and men are the most effective, the most soul-inspiring, and the most truly religious. A boy-choir can be formed and trained at an expense very little, if any, greater than that of a paid quartet; while the results are, beyond comparison, superior. The first requisite is an organist who is a good musician, a man of religious feelings, and a *gentleman*; for his influence over the boys must be of an improving nature. The next is some five or six gentlemen for bass and tenor parts, who must of course be paid; but need not be paid largely, as solo artists are not necessary for this work. The boys, who are the treble and alto, need no pay (unless it may be in the case of some phenomenon gifted with an unusually fine voice and musical feeling, to whom may be entrusted the solos), for they are more than recompensed for the time spent in rehearsals by the valuable musical training they receive, and the refinement that musical training unconsciously, but inevitably, gives them. Rehearsals for the boys should be held nearly every day; they should be trained to read from notes, not merely taught by rote the music they are to use in the church on the following Sunday. One full rehearsal (if the gentlemen read music at all, as they should) will then be sufficient. A well-balanced choir would be eight or ten trebles, two altos (boy altos are very strong and "telling"), two tenors, (another "telling" timbre of voice,) and four basses. With this material the finest works of the English Church composers can be thoroughly produced; and it is to the English musicians we have to look for all our really church-like music. Our American writers too often give us nothing but opera and water, or abominable twaddle.

The second and only remaining remedy is one which it will take so many years to thoroughly bring about, that it seems well-nigh hopeless; for it necessitates a complete change in our style of psalmody, and a concerted unity of action in all the churches of at least some one denomination. This remedy is a return to the old German Lutheran form of hymn-tune. Those grand old chorals, magnificent in simplicity, consisting almost invariably of a note to a syllable, generally within the compass of an octave, so that all voices can easily sing them, and written with especial reference to their effect by a mass of voices (the larger the better) are, musically, what is needed. But this is only part. Every hymn must have its own tune, to which it is always sung, and which is never used for any other hymn; so that these hymns and tunes may grow up together and become inseparable in the hearts and minds of our boys and girls, as they do in those of the German children; so that the words will invariably suggest the tune, and the tune the words. Lastly, *all* should sing; but only the melody. No attempts at singing in parts or harmony should be for an instant permitted; for it is the business of the organist (who must be a thoroughly studied musician) to vary his harmonies with the changing sentiment of every stanza. Such music, so performed—this mighty unison of human voices upborne on the changing waves of the organ's full harmony—will impress the most careless hearer and lift the devout soul to the gates of heaven.

The perfection of music for the Church would be the union of these two remedies,—the choir giving one or two grand anthems at each service and leading the people in the unisonal hymns; but this result is, we fear, too millennial ever to be achieved; it certainly will not be achieved in our time.

Our readers may, perhaps, wonder why this article, dealing as it does with a subject not apparently touching amateurs very nearly, and so serious in tone, has been admitted to our columns. The reason for its insertion here may be found in the importance of the subject to *all* who are in any way interested in music, and in the fact that it does, in truth, touch amateurs *more* nearly than may at the first glance appear; for it is to the unprofessional music lovers in our churches that we must look for necessary support and encouragement in any reform of this kind.

HINTS TO PIANO PURCHASERS.

AMONG the various musical instruments recognized in the present day, the piano is undoubtedly the one most affected by amateurs for various reasons. It is an instrument of *harmony*, in contradistinction to the orchestral instruments which, when used for solo performances, are solely melodic in character; it is *convenient*, as opposed to the organ, either of pipes or reeds, requiring for its fullest use, only the performer without the aid of a blower or assistant of any kind; and it is *available* for all kinds of music, from the slowest and most solemn to the most brilliant and rapid. It enables its possessor to become acquainted with the principal beauties of most orchestral and choral works (we say "most" as there are some which depend for their effects almost entirely on the contrasts of "color" available in the orchestra and the various combinations of voices) and possesses, in addition, a literature of its own which is almost boundless, and to which the greatest masters (with perhaps the single exception of Richard Wagner) have contributed liberally.

But in order that its uses may be fully appreciated it is necessary that the instrument in use shall be of good quality; obedient and responsive in touch, and "tone-worthy" in color.

While it is absolutely impossible to give written or verbal directions which shall enable an inexperienced person to select unhesitatingly a fine instrument, it is quite easy to present certain rules which will prevent the most practically ignorant purchaser from being very greatly imposed upon: and this we shall endeavor to do.

First of all, suspect all *small* manufacturers, and all *cheap* ones. The latter never can be good and the former (though there may be among them men of equal skill and knowledge with the greatest manufacturers) very rarely. In order that an instrument may be really good and durable it is necessary that all parts of the wood-work shall be made of thoroughly seasoned material; some of the woods needing to be as long as ten years in the yard before properly ready for use. Of course, during the time necessary for this seasoning, this wood represents so much dead capital; and involves an outlay and a loss of interest on the money expended which no small dealer can afford. It is true there are certain mechanical and chemical ways of rapidly simulating the thorough seasoning of woods; but they are incomplete, unsatisfactory, and, even when most successful, doubtful in absolute utility.

Secondly, do not get an instrument the tone of which is brilliant at the beginning. Such a piano will almost inevitably become "wiry" or "tin-ny" after a few months of really hard use.

Thirdly, suspect all instruments in extremely handsome cases at astonishingly low figures. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the whole instrument has been sacrificed to show. As you do not play upon the case, it is a matter of very secondary importance; and a good piano in a square and oiled black-walnut case will eventually give you more solid satisfaction than the most imposing looking jingle-box in the highest elaboration of carved rosewood and ornamentation. As a rule, the really fine manufacturers do not indulge in startling cases (except when made to order); and, to the initiated, the superabundance of work spent on the exterior is a pretty infallible advertisement of the manner in which the interior has been slighted. The highly-carved abominations with pearl-inlaid name-plates belong principally to a past decade; but they are to be shunned wherever seen.

Fifthly, in regard to the "touch": *i.e.*, the *feeling*

of the keys under the fingers of a player. This is a point on which it is almost impossible to give directions—especially as almost every player has his individual preferences; but it may, perhaps, be said that the touch should be neither very light nor very heavy. Avoid, above all things, a *sluggish* touch, where the key seems to the finger to hesitate before returning. This peculiarity is not visible to the eye; but the sensitive finger will tell the tale immediately.

Sixthly, see that the instrument "sings" well. That is to say, when a note is struck and the key held down instead of being allowed to return, see that the tone continues for some seconds. A good piano should retain an audible vibration for nearly a minute without any assistance from the (so-called) loud pedal.

Seventhly, on the other hand, see that the instrument "damps" well. In other words, when a note is struck sharply and the key is allowed immediately to return, see that the tone ceases instantly. This is an important point and should be tested on every note of the piano, from the lowest up to the high C; above that the vibrations are naturally short.

Those who cannot afford the prices charged by the best makers, will do better to take a second-hand piano from one of them (which can be procured very reasonably) than a new one from most other firms. A piano which has had some six or eight months of use (not abuse) is in some respects *better* than an absolutely new instrument. It has been thoroughly tested, and the wear in that amount of time is less than infinitesimal; while the difference in price between this and a new one will be found enormous. The false pride which prevents some people from buying a good instrument because it is called "second-hand," is too ridiculous to deserve an instant's consideration.

Notwithstanding that we have now given on this subject all the advice in our power, the fact remains that the best way for our amateur to choose his piano is not to choose it at all; but to get some experienced person *in whom he has well-grounded confidence* to choose it for him. But those who have no such person at command will, we hope, find the above hints of value.

Beware of agents! They will recommend the manufacturer who allows them the largest commission; and, if you must be cheated at all, there is at least some satisfaction in being permitted to perform the operation upon yourself.

Art Publications.

BOOKS.

THE GREAT ARTISTS.—JACOPO ROBUSTI, CALLED TINTORETTO.—No volume in "the artist series" published by Sampson Low & Co. has been more skillfully prepared than that of Tintoretto, by W. Roscoe Osler, of which, as of all the corresponding works in that group, a special edition is imported for American readers by Scribner & Welford. The editor's part in the work is really such that the circumstance of the volume being less abundantly illustrated than others of the series hardly effects its comparative value, inasmuch as the examples chosen markedly signify the traits of the artist. The biography is not as a literary work superfluous, or simply for the convey of a handful of reproductions of the great painter's works, and the lack of any separate volume in English on Tintoretto is reason sufficient for its being. From the Italian, French, and German histories have been singled out precisely those elements which were best fitted for vivid representation of the subject, and these are grouped with that thoroughly artistic method which proves an author's entire mastery over his materials. The subtle philosophy indulged in throughout the first chapter, in which the creative element in Venetian painting is discussed, might be thought not strictly in harmony with the purposes generally comprehended in this series. But the divisions being very plainly distinctive, the superficial reader can neglect this without trouble, and pass on to the next section, where the biography of Tintoretto definitely commences. The literary style possesses a peculiar charm, while the information conveyed is comprehensive and precise, and most usefully arranged for the student. The chapters separately take up the works of the master in different collections, and the chronological study is aided by the great completeness of the indexes. These are various and go even to the extent of presenting diagrams of the rooms of the Scuola di San Rocco at Venice, with the position of Tintoretto's paintings therein indicated by numbers. Combining such definite guidances with the able criticisms which are given—criticisms which instruct on all points and stop only after showing what pictures have been "destroyed by restoration"—the student is well equipped for an investigation of the qualities of Tintoretto.

THE GREAT ARTISTS.—HANS HOLBEIN.—The Holbein bibliography, in which the art literature of Europe is far from being deficient, receives a convenient addition in the

new work edited by Mr. Joseph Cundall from Dr. Woltmann's "Holbein und seine Zeit," and published in the art biographical series of Messrs. Sampson Low & Co. It is a dozen years ago that Mr. Wornum, keeper and secretary of the National Gallery, gave his account of the life and writings of Hans Holbein, and there has been no subsequent work of importance on the subject in English, if we except the translation of the first edition of Dr. Woltmann's work, which was published in handsome style in London in 1872. But since, belonging to the present year are several other volumes on this subject beside the one under notice, including that published at Stuttgart and the folio by Paul Mantz brought out in Paris, it would appear that interest in the great painter of Augsburg is at least not waning. Certainly England, enriched as her royal galleries are with the masterpieces of this artist, could not very appropriately be backward in contributing to the store of information respecting him. In the present instance the reader is offered a simply descriptive account of Holbein's varied works in wall paintings, altar pieces, portraits, and illustrations, without disclosure of the least temptation to over-profound theoretical discussion to which modern cognoscenti so frequently show themselves prone as to discourage the greater number of readers but those of continual leisure. The book is conceived rather on the practical basis of instruction, is arranged conveniently for reference, and duly supplied with lists and chronological tables. It contains upward of twenty illustrations, of which two are engraved after works of Hans Holbein the elder. The Basel Museum, the Dresden Gallery, the Stadel Institute, the Louvre, and the Berlin Museum, contribute almost exclusively to the pictorial representation, the historical portraits at Windsor being singly illustrated by that of the Duke of Norfolk. The volume, being uniform in appearance with others of the series, is in a prettily stamped, pale-tinted binding of cloth of a style too much affected by publishers for works of this kind; it more properly belongs to the novel of the day than to books designed for more permanent usefulness, for a book always should be agreeable to the touch as in other ways, and soiled covers are less attractive than unadorned ones. At the price, however, of these biographies, of which the editions imported by Scribner & Welford are purchasable at \$1.25 per volume, it is perhaps hardly worth while to complain of a delicacy which is charming so long as its freshness continues, considering that bindings are to be replaced at very small cost.

ART DECORATION APPLIED TO FURNITURE.—No longer quite a new book, as new is understood in this era of publishing, the work of Mrs. Spofford on artistic house-furnishing has passed into the rank of tested and useful standards. It is entitled to maintain this place, not so much perhaps for any definite value of practical instruction in furnishing our dwellings at this day, of which it communicates less than might be desired by some, or for very great thoroughness in the history of house decoration—which in a compass of but little upward of two hundred pages would be manifestly impossible—as for its agreeably presenting to those readers to whom rigid study is a dread, that degree of intelligence which places an intellect even with the average understanding of these subjects. It is, in short, in its historical character, a "coup d'œil" of the world's furniture rather than the long attentive examination, the philosophically precise treatment of origin, development and desuetude. And in nothing is the immense difference between the modern and the ancient literary demand so well illustrated as in a comparison of a volume like this with those of Athenæus, and other of the old writers, to whom the idea of exhausting such a subject, for instance, as that of the table in half a dozen pages, as our recent author has done, would have seemed absurd. In our generation absurdity lies all the other way. Tediousness is intolerable, and very little information from single books will satisfy provided these are sufficiently numerous and finely illustrated. Nor is this modern method of publication without advantages for a selecting public, if the requisite of properly restricting the subject is observed. Without limitation as to time or nationality, the work of proportioning any history of arts with proper symmetry can never be an easy one. In the present instance the defects are only such as are inevitable to that system, although it could be wished that a closer order in classifying the furniture of different countries had been followed, since this would have been possible and would have added much to the philosophical value of such a treatise. Still, the admirable illustrations, with the precision of their titles, go very far toward supplying this want. The manner of their execution also reflects as great credit on the engraving department of the Messrs. Harper as any choice work recently issued from that source. These embrace nothing, however, to represent any tendencies of recent artistic manufacture, and hereby they correspond with the range of the text, which might very well have embodied some discriminating notice of this kind, since the author, wherever giving suggestions, proves a judgment of such genuine quality. As something more than mere individual fancy is involved in these ideas, they are well worthy the consideration of any thoughtful person having a home to adorn, and who it is to be hoped practically exercises such general views as are conveyed in this author's final chapters. For it is only in a general way that any true advance in matters of taste is to be gained by instruction, as the writer of this book has signified: "Much may be said about the subject of furnishing as an art, but when every instruction has been given that love of beauty or knowledge of origin and correspondence can impart, it will still be felt that furnishing is an affair of genius and tact, that is, of thorough taste; and that unless these qualities are brought to bear upon it, the most magnificent garniture that a room can have might as well be four pine chairs and a table, for all the real harmony and delight of home produced by it." This is the decision reached in the concluding chapter, and the author's reserve throughout in offering special directions is in correspondence with it.